



# ABILITY BEYOND DISABILITY

A Resource For Changing Lives

## *Testimony Presented Before the Public Health & Human Services Committees:*

Privatization and Relocation of Services Provided by  
Department of Developmental Services and Department of  
Mental Health and Addiction Services

Tom Fanning, President, Ability Beyond Disability, Inc.  
Public Hearing Date: September 3, 2009

Good Afternoon, Senator Harris, Senator Doyle, Representative Ritter, Representative Walker and all committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to present my thoughts regarding the transition of some services from State operation to private providers. My name is Tom Fanning. I am the President of Ability Beyond Disability, a non profit provider with contracts with several State agencies.

It is my view that it is time for the General Assembly to recast the issue that has been discussed in one form or another for decades. For too long, the debate has been around whether health and human services should be provided in the private sector or by public employees. The lack of a resolution to this debate has resulted in a bifurcated, duplicative array of services which is far from being optimally efficient or effective.

The ground needs to shift from a debate over whether services should be provided by State employees or private providers to a thoughtful discussion focused on planning for an affordable and sustainable system of services for those who will rely upon them in the coming decades. This shouldn't be an argument about who provides services...it should be a strategic discussion about how the needs of people can best be met with quality services, efficiently and effectively, now and tomorrow.

The current financial crisis is nothing more than an abrupt introduction to a long term human services crisis. The changing demographics of our entire society mean that there will be fewer resources available for more people with more needs, not just for the next two years, but for decades to come. The real question before you today isn't about saving \$5 or \$10 million the next couple of years: it is "do we have a plan for an affordable and sustainable system of service delivery for the next 20 years?"

The immediate financial crisis does offer an instructive parallel. General Motors insisted that "same ole, same ole" would somehow result in good outcomes. Ford, on the other hand, looked ahead and made strategic decisions years ago that avoided the pains of GM's bankruptcy. At some point, the State of Connecticut will need to make strategic decisions that stretch beyond two

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To enable individuals whose independent living skills are impaired by disability, illness or injury, to achieve and maintain self-reliance, fulfillment and comfort at home, at work and in the community, by providing the best comprehensive home, health and rehabilitation services.

year budget cycles or four year terms. If strategic plans are not developed and followed with discipline, the pain felt by our most vulnerable citizens in the coming decades will be of a magnitude beyond that which we can comprehend today.

To be clear, I am a proponent of services provided in the private, non profit sector with high expectations for satisfaction and measurable outcomes required by appropriate State agencies and those who receive services. We have demonstrated the ability to provide quality services efficiently and effectively over many years. The steps being proposed today are, I believe, the right steps but the manner in which they are being implemented is unnecessarily disruptive and concerning to consumers and their families...because of the lack of planning and foresight.

A true State and provider partnership, built on the foundation of a sound plan for an affordable and sustainable system of service delivery, is the only way we can hope to meet human needs going forward. It is the only way we can hope, in the future, to avoid the dilemma now faced by service recipients and their families.

For your reference: Letter to the Editor by a Parent:

To the Editor:

As a parent of an individual with mental retardation who lives in a group home operated by Ability Beyond Disability, I read with interest the \*August 21 article "Protesters stage rally at Rell's house" in which families and staff of group homes for people with mental retardation discuss their concerns with plans to turn State operated homes over to private agencies like Ability Beyond Disability.

I first would like to state that I empathize with the families concern of the unknown. All parents worry about changes in the lives of their children that they fear could negatively impact them. I also clearly understand that staff and residents of a group home develop close relationships that can closely approximate family. As a parent, I fully appreciate how the proposed changes could be concerning.

On the other hand, I did feel that the article did not do justice to agencies like Ability Beyond Disability, an organization that has been supporting people with mental retardation and other disabilities in area communities for more than 55 years. My son has lived in a home operated by Ability Beyond Disability for 9 years. The professional care and loving attention he has received has resulted in a marked improvement in his life. Homes operated by non profit agencies must meet the same standards as those operated by the State: many exceed those standards. The implication that the quality of services that would be offered by private, non profit agencies would be less than that provided in publicly operated group homes is simply not true.

To the families of the residents of the State operated homes, I understand your anxiety. But, I can assure that, if Ability Beyond Disability is representative of the States' non profit private providers, your concerns are apt to be short lived. My thoughts are with you as you go through the transition.

(\* Danbury News Times)